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Missed opportunities in industry

The problems of the traditional and modern furniture industry, and lack of backward linkage problems, were well spotlighted (DS Dec 15).

Due to similar indifferent attitude, during the previous decades Bangladesh missed earning huge foreign exchange by exporting only raw leather, without developing the value-added products. Now finished leather goods like shoes, suitcases, and bags are entering the market, but the local manufacturers face many problems connected with financing and backward linkage, which have to be tackled on priority basis by the government. We have huge cattle wealth, but there is no long-term integrated development programme. Only recently we have started thinking about exporting (halal) beef good market in the Islamic world.

The authorities displayed similar lack of awareness when the RMG sector found it lacked backward linkage industries to boost exports, and we were earning only foreign exchange for the garment stitching charges (tailoring)! The future industrial management problems cannot be anticipated quickly enough by the policy planners at the higher levels, for three main causes: lack of professional analysis at the right level and time; wrong type of bureaucratic practices in the civil service; and, topped by amateurish political leadership, whose attention is always diverted to frivolous and bitter infights.

Similarly, we can export sizeable quantities of vegetables, fish, meat and fruits. The multi-uses of jute can be revived; we need not import sugar, we can reach the top in export of fertilisers, but there is poor coordination at the top; and, the continuity is lost after change of regime. Our political culture is inward-looking and selfish, and insensitive to national goals. We have to get rid of agitative politics and get down to serious, concentrated development work.

There are no scientific and modern inputs in the traditional furniture cottage industry (I), as we are endowed by nature with good quality wood for manufacturing world-class furniture. When I returned from my posting abroad, I bought a whole set of local made to order home furniture for our residential establishment. Now, after a decade, most of these are moth-eaten, and I have to go for refurbishing. Go for wood or synthetic material like particle and synthetic board furniture, as quality wood is too expensive, and cheaper wood cannot be trusted?

Local DIY (self-assembly) furniture kits are not available in the country; these are cheaper to buy as less labour cost is involved, (the sets I brought are still working fine). It is surprising to see the market dominated by huge import of foreign furniture, resulting in huge waste of foreign exchange.

The local industrialists have to mount a huge campaign for buying local products. The government, as facilitator, has to be active to coordinate campaigns, and offer better environment for investment, by improving the quality of local products. We have serious infrastructure problems in the production fields. The consumers have become victims of imitation products. The entrepreneurs do not seem to be interested in tapping this huge billion taka local market. If we can satisfy the 130 million local shoppers, then export earnings would take care of itself. The same approach applies to the tourism industry we are concentrating prematurely on foreign tourists, with incomplete infrastructure, in a social environment invested with corrupt practices, insecurity due to terrorist activities, toll collectors, and hijackers!

The government should start an awareness campaign to buy local products. When millions of foreigners can wear our world-class readymade garments, why we have to buy other products of foreign origin? It means we have the means to improve the quality of our products.

There is one integrated solution: transparent political culture!

AMMA'ab, Dhaka



"The post-71 generation"

Dear Mr. Zafar Sobhan - In your well written article "The post-71 generation" you write "The Bangladesh we live in today is not the Bangladesh anyone hoped for". Why did it happen? This letter reflects your thoughtful article as you have covered the important issues well. The biggest opportunity the 71 generation missed was to divide the country into two antagonistic factions - the freedom fighters and non-freedom fighters (who constituted the vast majority) instead of uniting the country as Nelson Mandela and his colleagues did in South Africa. We must face this fact head-on as you rightly say that "the very generation that brought us our greatest moment...is the same generation that has been unable to vanquish its own demons..." In 1971 there was no reconciliation or forgiveness. The freedom fighters - genuine or otherwise - lost credibility when they bartered their sacrifice for office, promotion and material benefits. The nation stood divided instead of uniting in one fold. The great divide continues 32 years after the event and is actively nurtured. I agree with you that "the difference we see today among the warring factions in the nation stem from those days". I do hope your prognosis that "there can never be forgiveness and reconciliation" is not correct as that will spell the doom of this nation. I hope "the post 71 generation is more pragmatic and less emotional, more realistic and less ideological, that (their) feuds are not blood feuds, and that (their) history will not be one of ancient enmity and bitterness". Redemption may come with the "passing of the torch" from the hands of the 71 generation to post 71 generation, if "the ghosts of 1971 and its aftermath can finally be laid to rest", if the new generation of politicians could break away from the growing nexus between crime and affairs of state, if there is pragmatism and realism and a sense of social responsibility. I am not sure if it is too much to expect.

A reader, On e-mail



PHOTO: INTERNET

, so many of our people didn't like it. On the other hand, many cybercafes filled up the form incorrectly.

So many people were cheated. The authorities concerned should look into the matter and punish the elements responsible for cheating people.

Md. Shahidullah, Dhaka

Rab

Rab is working to keep law and order under control. They have been working for a few months. A few months ago, the law and order situation of Bangladesh was pathetic. Anti-social elements, godfathers and terrorists had taken control of society. The police were unable to control them for some reasons known to all. But after the beginning of their (Rab's) operations we see a different situation.

The godfathers and all other criminals have been forced, in most cases, to give up their business of victimising people. Rab's work during the month of Ramadan was

really praiseworthy. A number of terrorists have been killed in crossfire. Those who pose a threat to society have no right to live.

Redwan Noor Ullah, IIUC

December 16

Every year 16 December comes with a beckoning of hope to chase away poverty, crime and, above all, political imbroglio that has reared its ugly head in every area of our national life. The day holds a profound significance for those who saw the liberation war; a generation with ideals and dreams. And to find their country being freed after nine months of intense battle on this day of 1971 was a day to remember for those who lived through traumas and exodus in those nightmarish days. They had hoped for a glorious Sonar Bangla but it was never going to be the case. From 1971 Bangladesh has surrendered to the diabolical hands only to find itself reeling on the brink of disaster. We now find ourselves usurped by a neo-oligarchy strong enough to

subdue the dreams of the common people of Bangladesh.

The post-Cold War era was always going to be difficult for the third world countries. Bangladesh is no exception. We have reluctantly given ourselves up in the hands of neo-capitalists ruling our country. They are the ardent supporters of the West directed policies. The growing spree of shopping complexes is a reflection of the western influence. Laissez-faire shopping has become a fashion for the people of Dhaka. Even the education sector has not been spared. Young students aspire to study something that would give them economic stability, but the goal of education is to turn someone into a better human being.

People at the helm have become obsessed with the capitalist culture. The impact of this obsession is disastrous. We find ourselves in the comforts offered to us in a modern urban society. This slouching way of effacing our culture and values is paying rich dividends to the Americans who are out to establish new colonies by

Asif Iqbal
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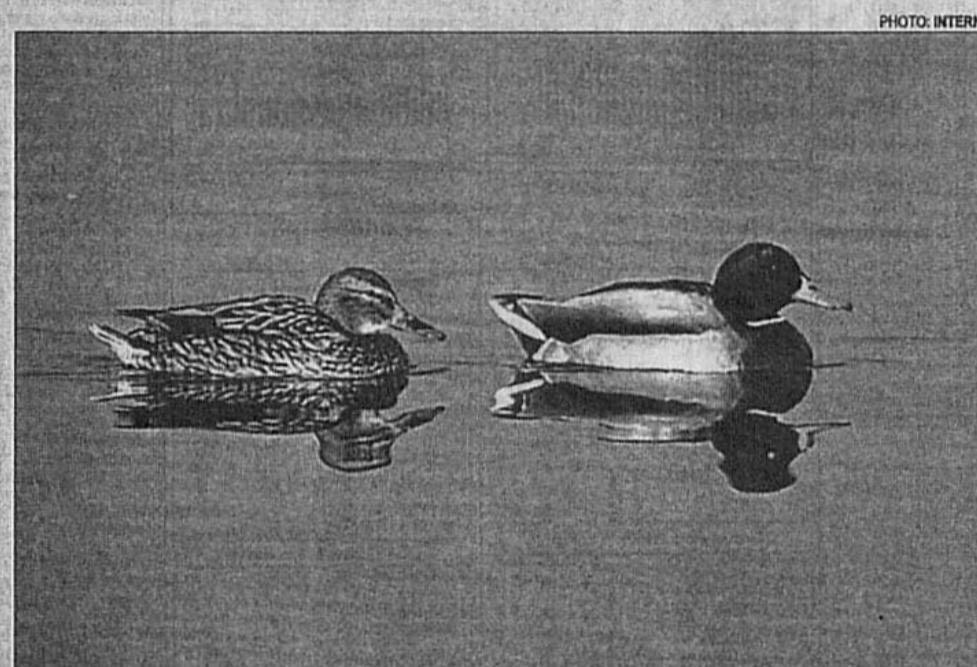


PHOTO: INTERNET

Winter birds

Cold wind has started to blow and it reminds us that the winter is coming. The visiting birds, a beautiful creature, also start to come to Bangladesh from the Arctic regions during the chilly days. But, there are some greedy men who catch the birds and sell them in the streets. These birds are our guests of winter.

But they have no security. The government should take proper steps to protect these birds. We should not buy the birds from the greedy sellers. We should have the sense that birds are too lovely to be caught and slaughtered.

Amena Tahete Alam

Chittagong

Most often we see some people selling the guest birds standing in the city streets. The background behind the coming of these birds to our land is very sad and painful. Especially, when the extent of coldness reaches beyond the limit of endurance, the guest birds begin to migrate to far-off lands from that moment. They come not only because of biting cold but also for want of food. They begin to move to our land in swarms. The most wonderful fact about these birds is that they fly thousands and thousands of miles at a stretch when they come to our land. And in the same way when they return to their homeland with the change of season, they again fly thousands and thousands of miles. It takes three months to cover the distance from their homeland to our country and when they return, it takes another three months.

Thus six months of their lives are lost in the air. We regard them as our guests because they come to our land only to stay for a short period in search of food and shelter. We wonder how unkind could we be to catch them and eat them with great relish. I feel inclined to ask - why should we be so heartless?

Umme Habiba

On e-mail

DV-2006

Many people were dreaming that they would go to America through the DV-2006. They were very enthusiastic about the whole thing. But most of the cyber-cafes asked for a very high rate for filling up the form.

Privatisation

Not long ago, most of the organisations were in the ownership of the private individuals. Profit motive to the extent of intolerant limit, and other vices of these private individuals became very transparent. Exploitation by them could not be kept invisible. As a result of these factors, the government had to establish public enterprises to ease the public inconveniences. After liberation, the owners of so many mills and industries left their establishments. The government then had no other option than to nationalise those industries. Before liberation, according to an estimate, 80% of the total wealth of the country was locked in the hands of 22 families. Thus equitable distribution of wealth was also a motive behind nationalisation. Now privatisation? We talk of privatisation every minute. The state owned enterprises incur losses. For example, Chittagong Steel Industries was incurring huge losses. It has been stopped/closed. Immediately after its closure price of iron rods has increased 2/3 times. We are privatising profit earning institutions. We are privatising profit earning banks. If one bank earns 14 crore taka in one year each person will share one taka. The government uses instrumentalities of government bank to fight the after effects of flood and other natural calamities. Private banks earn profit but their earnings will increase the wealth of a few individuals only. Their earnings will help to accumulate wealth in a few hands. But profit earned by government owned enterprises will help in equitable distribution of wealth. Therefore, "PRESCRIPTION" for "PRIVATISATION" should not be swallowed repeatedly without any break. This may lead to a situation again to nationalise each and everything without leaving any scope for rational judgement.

Tapader Md Khalilur Rahman
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A prayer for my brother

A part of me left a long time ago and passed away. My brother died a long time ago. He was a lot older than me. He died when he was a baby. I was born much later. I never had an older brother and I never will. My ancestors have passed away. Human beings are spirits or souls. Thousands of souls. I think when people die, their souls and spirits live on. The Christians believe in an afterlife. The Sufis also believe that the soul lives and we have a spiritual existence. According to Irish beliefs and folklore, Halloween is a holy evening or all souls day when we are supposed to pray for those who passed away. In Mexico, stripping "others" of their culture and language. The same theory was applied in the Spanish colonies of the Americas to destroy splendid Mayan, Aztec and Inca cultures that are still considered as grand by historians. The southeast Asian countries have a huge western influence on their mundane living style. In fact, half of the world has been tamed by the western culture that has proved to be an excellent power to rule the world imposingly with capitalist ideals.

We the Bangladeshi have been fortunate enough to hold on to our culture and social values just because we have a greater respect for our past, especially our liberation struggle. But the cart soon could be turned upside down if the younger generation is not convinced to turn their attention to our ailing nation that has withstood many alien invasions. Another growing problem is people's interest in the English Medium schools. To many, this is a symbol of status. Worse still, the parents insist their toddlers to speak in English in public. The older students are far worse. They have no sense of valuing the Bengali culture. These guys are busy imitating the west and most of the students studying in this class are encouraged by their parents to imitate the west and to use English as their language of communication.

Asif Iqbal

Department of English, DU

Of processions

Our modern life is beset with multiple forms of processions. There is hardly any week when there is no procession. Processions are of various kinds. There are marriage processions, religious processions, political processions and processions by trade union people. All processions cause sound pollution and are irritating to the disinterested observers. The thud and clamour of people in the crowded streets and indiscriminate use of microphones in different processions are the main sources of sound pollution - processions are a feature of the city life.

Some of the processions are highly colourful. Political procession is one of them. Flags and banners are parts of most of the processions. When a procession passes along a road, the vehicular traffic comes to a standstill, slogans are repeated and if it is a protest march, angry fists are displayed by the marchers. Political processions tend to be violent leading to destruction of private and public properties and involving police actions. A procession, of whatever kind it may be, arouses much interest among crowds of onlookers. Sometimes rooftops and balconies of houses on both sides of road along which a procession passes are filled with such onlookers. The men and women forming a procession lose their individual identity. The procession itself assumes a character of its own. The individual ego then is overpowered by the social ego. Processions thus symbolise the gregarious nature of man.

Istiaque Ahmed, Dept of ELL, IIUC

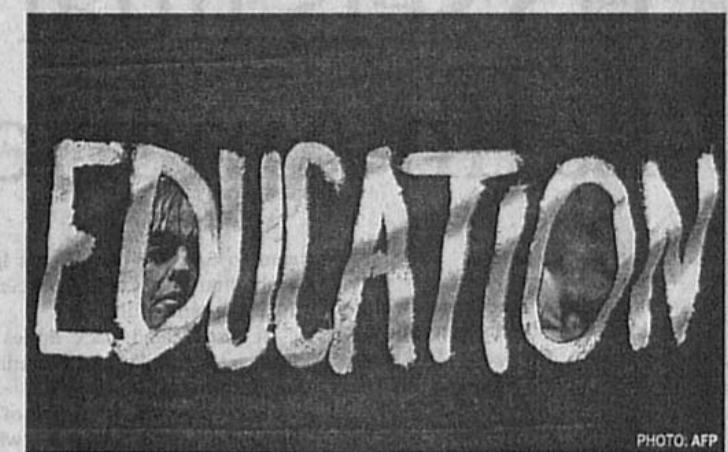


PHOTO: AFP

Let's start our journey

No one knows where the end is, from where we should start. Yes, I am talking about the editorial 'Educational institution under lock and key' published in the daily star on 15 Dec. 2004. It was 1989, I was a student of Madrasa-i- Aliah, Dhaka, my institute was closed. The reason was same as Chittagong Medical College, the only difference was that the Chhatra Dal called the strike to stop the student union election while Chhatra Shibir was opposing them. Even though I am talking about an incident in 1989, still we can see the same in 2004. So many years have passed, why we can't expect a better institutional environment in the 21st century?

It is not only a matter of shame but also sorrow and pity when we see the news, boldly written 'hall vacant or strike of X or Y institution' quite frequently on top of our newspapers. I am a PhD student, studying in Singapore. As a student I have got the chance to meet and mingle with foreign students from countries from all over the world. Most of the time, I found an inconsistency between my age and level of study when I compared myself with them. Why? I lost time in the university due to aimless student politics in my institute. So many times our educational institutes are obstructed by different kinds of unwanted activities. In a foreign institute, a student knows his or her graduation date on orientation day. It is not only mind boggling but also unbelievable to my foreign friends that we lose a long span of time before entering university after higher secondary. A university does not have a fixed schedule for examination each year and an educational institute can have holidays that were not scheduled at the beginning of the academic year.

During my masters course in Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand, I was elected general secretary of the students union. I should mention here, it would not have been easy for me to be elected to that position unless all Bangladeshi fellows supported me during election. The students union of AIT was just a union like any students body in Bangladesh. But the difference is that we dealt with academic matters only, not politics.

Why our students unions cannot do so in our country? After all, students should be concerned with their studies only.

Mohammad Harunur Rashid Meer, PhD student
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the people also have a tradition for the day of the dead. Death of people in the past and the days to come. Life and death in the legendary Mexican symbol. I do not have an answer as to why my brother died. I still feel that he is a soul that roams and visits me, an angel spirit, a blessed baby. Blessed angels, blessed baby. The blossoms, the olive tree. I am sad because you did not see my happy days. I am glad because you did not see the horrible grief and violence in life. My brother is near the olive tree, on a borderland, beside a river. Like a rare gemstone. My brother died a long time ago.

EM, On e-mail

No change in US policy

Following the US invasion and destruction of Iraq, killing of thousands of Iraqis and arrest of Saddam Hussein, we do not find any change in policy and strategy of the US President George W. Bush in occupied Iraq.

Similarly, after the demise of the great Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat there is no change in the policy of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on occupied Palestine.

Both George Bush and Ariel Sharon left no stone unturned to accuse and implicate Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat in serious charges, offences and crimes but when the truth, accountability and transparency of actual facts and figures

have come out both Bush and Sharon have fallen into new depths of disgrace.

The plan of Washington-Tel Aviv is to create division, hatred and enmity among the Arabs and to provoke them to shed the blood of each other. This is what the US wants to attain by installing puppet No. 01 Hamid Karzai as President of Afghanistan and puppet No. 02 Allawais as prime minister of Iraq.

We wonder why does George Bush on the one hand want UN forces and involvement of NATO and EU for maintaining law and order in occupied Iraq, and oppose, on the other hand, posting of UN forces and involvement of NATO and EU in occupied Palestine?

The duplicity is far too evident.

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PHOTO: AFP